

WellStar School of Nursing Celebrates 40 Years Academic Excellence, Service Define Its Legacy

From its humble beginnings producing two associate degree graduates in 1970, to one of the top producers of nurses in the state, the WellStar School of Nursing has come a long way.

Today, the nursing school, which celebrates its 40th anniversary this year, produces more than 150 graduates annually and offers two master's degrees. The school is seeking Board of Regents' approval for its first doctoral program.

"When you look at how far we've come in the last 40 years, it was the ideal time to celebrate all of the hard work that's been done," said WellStar College of Health and Human Services Dean Richard Sowell. "It's important to look back, take stock and honor what's been accomplished by so many."

Students, alumni, faculty, administrators and friends of the nursing school recently

gathered at the KSU Center for an anniversary celebration. Charlotte Sachs, the founding director of the nursing school, was in attendance. Sachs, 91, was presented with a "Nursing Excellence Award."

"At the time the nursing program was being developed, Mrs. Sachs was a strong advocate for establishing high admissions standards for nursing students when others thought the standards did not have to be quite so high for potential nurses," Sowell said, "and we continue that tradition of excellence today."

The School of Nursing added a Bachelor of Science in Nursing in 1985, and started offering a Master of Science in Nursing in 1995. A second graduate program, the M.S.N. in Advanced Care Management and Leadership, was added in 2004. KSU stopped offering the associate degree in nursing in 1995.

The School of Nursing has a rich tradition of service. It operates one of only a few community-based, nurse-managed clinics in the state. The KSU Clinic at MUST Ministries, operated by the Center for Community Health Care Services, provides office visits, phone consultations and prescription refills to the uninsured.

"We are providing a safety net for those without access to health care to the tune of 2,500 to 3,000 contacts a year," Sowell said.

As construction gets under way on a new, 200,000-square-foot Health Sciences Building – scheduled for completion in fall 2010 – Sowell hopes the next 40 years sees the nursing school continuing to serve the surrounding community, as well as establishing more international partnerships. The nursing school has established alliances with universities in Egypt, Brazil, Mexico and South Africa.



Charlotte Sachs receives a Lifetime Service Award from Dean Richard Sowell of KSU.

"I want us to not only be contributing significantly to Cobb County and north Georgia, but I hope the expertise of our faculty and staff will be having an impact globally," he said.

The Children's Program of Hospice Atlanta – Committed to Pediatric Care for 18 Years

For 18 years, Hospice Atlanta (a division of Visiting Nurse Health System) has been providing quality care to children with life-limiting illnesses and their families. That mission has not changed but sometimes the names and faces do. Under the expert leadership of Myra Downs, R.N., M.S.N., Executive Director of the Hospice Atlanta program overall, the pediatric division has a new name and a new director.

"We changed the name to 'The Children's Program of Hospice Atlanta' because we believe it's more representative of the multifaceted program we offer," says Downs. The program's youngest patients and their families receive comprehensive physical, spiritual, and psychosocial care and compassionate bereavement care.

The new Director is Beth Vogel, RN, MN, MPH. A nursing and public health graduate of Emory University, Beth worked for many years with critically ill children at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, Egleston (formerly Egleston Children's Hospital) and also worked for several years in the pediatric ICU at Grady Memorial Hospital. An educator, leader and compassionate caregiver,

Beth has 30 years of pediatric experience.

Vogel joined Hospice Atlanta six months ago and knew immediately she was in the right place. "Caring for children is my life's passion," she says, "and I feel honored to be part of The Children's Program of Hospice Atlanta. There is nothing more painful than losing a child, but when that is inevitable, we do everything possible to give comfort and support."

One name that hasn't changed is that of the Medical Director, Dr. Paul Fernhoff, who helped start the program in 1992. A respected and veteran physician, he is known for his work with terminally ill children and pediatric bioethical issues. As a tenured associate professor of Human Genetics and Pediatrics at Emory University, his many other accomplishments include more than 75 peer reviewed publications, 20 years as a volunteer with the March of Dimes and a physician finalist for the 2008 Atlanta Business Chronicle's Health Care Heroes.

The pediatric team brings a multitude of talents and perspectives to the children's hospice program. Specially trained nurses,

social workers, chaplains and volunteers address the child's needs and support the family as they face the premature death of a child. Special services include certified medical interpreters to assist non-English speaking families.

When terminally-ill infants and children come to Hospice Atlanta exhibiting rare chromosomal syndromes, Dr. Fernhoff works closely with the clinicians to ensure state-of-the-art care. The entire team helps families better understand the difficult and often heart-breaking situation.

Bereavement services are offered for two years and bereavement camps are an integral part of the services. Camp STARS, now in its 14th year, provides a wonderful environment where kids can begin to process their loss. Barbara Moore and Denise Greenberger, LCSW, started the camps in 1994 and continue to work with hundreds of children and families each year. The camps in 2009 will be held on March 13-15 (families) and November 6-8 (children only). The camps take place at Camp Twin Lakes in Rutledge, GA.

The Children's Hospice Program of



Beth Vogel

Atlanta believes every child in Atlanta who needs hospice care deserves to receive it. The organization's not-for-profit status and generous donations from the community make it possible to provide care for many who have few resources. The next fund-raiser is the Big-To-Do, a fun family event on Sunday, April 26, from 5:30 p.m. on at Zoo Atlanta. For more information, go to www.vnhs.org.

For more information about The Children's Program of Hospice Atlanta, call Myra Downs at (770) 936-1034 or visit us at www.vnhs.org.

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